

# CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

## The Confucian Vision for a Good Society

Global Ethics Network, An Ethical Dialogue between Asia and the West

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### Transcript

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### Introduction

**DEVIN STEWART:** It is my pleasure to introduce today our keynote speaker for lunch. James Hsiung is professor of politics at New York University [NYU]. He came to us highly recommended to speak about Confucianism today. He is also [author and editor](#) of—is it more than 18 books?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** Twenty-four. Number twenty-three came out in May, 24 came out in August.

**DEVIN STEWART:** Congratulations. That is a big number. Twenty-four books, that might be a record in the audience here today.

He has written on Pacific-Asian international relations, U.S.-Asian relations, Chinese foreign policy, and international law. His current research interest is in sea power. At NYU he teaches comparative politics of China and Japan, international relations of Asia, international law, and international governance. The title of his talk today is "The Confucian Vision for a Good Society," which connects to the presenter just before you. One of the students was presenting on that very topic. We are very, very happy to have you, Professor.

Please welcome Professor Hsiung.

### Remarks

**JAMES HSIUNG:** Ladies and gentlemen, let me share with you a joke I just heard about the Chinese [woman](#) who [received](#) the Nobel Prize in Medicine. There are two co-winners. The reason why there are two co-winners is because on the day it was announced, two very anxious people turned up and took the front seat. One was named [William Campbell](#) and the other named [Satoshi Omura](#), a Japanese gentleman. When the representative from the committee said, "This year's winner of the Nobel Prize in Medical Science, her name is Tu Youyou." That is according to the Chinese order. The family name comes first. But if you turn it around, by the English order, it would be Youyou Tu. So the person announced, "The winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Medical Science is Youyou Tu." Therefore, there are two other co-winners.

That is a joke that I don't want to be selfish keeping to myself.

[Confucian](#) vision of a good society: [Confucius](#) lived in the sixth century BC. He was a communitarian moralist who believed in the original good of human nature, only subsequently warped or corrupted by influences in the social environment, including paucity and poverty. If you have two apples and two

kids, they won't fight, but if I only have one apple and two kids, they are going to fight for that one apple. Therefore, paucity, scarcity, as well as poverty, can be one of the corrupting influences in society.

Confucius was born in an era of great chaos and instability. History books tell us that there were sons killing their parents and subordinate officials killing their kings. Confucius was very, very preoccupied with social order and orderliness. He was troubled by all that.

But his vision for a redeemed society was based on two tenets: one, that moral cultivation can restore the original good in human nature, and second, that a web of affect-laden—referring to affection—relationships be established in a society that is assimilated to a close-knit family.

I will just give you one example of what an affect-laden relationship can be. We can learn this from a story about one of his disciples, [Zigong](#). He was away when the master passed away. When he came back, he not only planted a tree, as is usually done, but he built a hut for himself next to the master's grave, and he stayed in that hut, not for one year or two years, but three years in earnest mourning.

My son would not do that after I die.

To Confucius, order, like charity, begins at home. If people are filial to their parents, they are not likely to be anti-social, much less rebellious against society, nor disloyal to the monarch or the sovereign. The cultivated elites, known as *junzi*—exemplary individuals, known in Chinese as *junzi*—hold the key to a good society. Hence, a good vision for a great nation begins with personal cultivation, which begins with a moral refinement of the individual that, in turn, entails the restoration of human nature to its original good.

Thus, ultimately, education holds the key. But education is not what is being taught in school. Just as an individual never ceases to learn in his lifetime, society is a big school affording an unending process of moral redemption.

Like [Socrates](#), Confucius treasured virtue and likewise believed that virtue can be taught and be ingrained in people's psyche. The difference is, for Confucius, virtue is reached through the restoration of the original good in human nature, and education is a restorative process unto itself. For Socrates, it was impossible, inconceivable to unify opposites. In contrast, Confucius emphasized the importance of harmonizing opposites. This has turned out to be a very unique aspect of Chinese culture. Later on I will come back to this point.

For Confucius, only the properly educated *junzi*, or exemplary persons, should be entrusted with the governance of society or the polity. The monarch, who should be subject to the same requirements of the moral dictate, should be assisted by these exemplary men, who came to be known as *shidafu* [scholar officials] in Chinese, or, in English, "litocrats," a combination of two words, "literary" and "bureaucrats," litocrats.

But where do these cultivated people come from? That was the origin of the celebrated Chinese *Keju* system, or a civil service examination system writ large. After Confucianism was officially adopted as the national teaching in 136 BC, during the [Han dynasty](#), the [Keju examination system](#) was introduced on an experimental basis, and within a few decades, a plebian man named [Gongsun Hong](#) became the first commoner to rise through the *Keju* system to become the nation's prime minister.

Back in the first or second century BC, where else could you find an example to show that a plebian could rise up to the position of prime minister? This was very, very unusual, very, very unique.

Later the *Keju* system became regulated and more institutionalized in the [Tang dynasty](#), sixth century

to tenth century, and it produced the world's first civil service. This civil service part of the system—there was more than the civil service; that is why I said the civil service part of the system—was copied by the Ottoman Empire, and from there, it was introduced to England, and from England, it was brought to America. So our civil service system actually owes its origin to this system in China.

The most fundamental change brought on by the Confucianization of China was that knowledge superseded or replaced wealth as the criterion for social mobility. The state—that is, the government—became the certifying agent of social mobility through this Keju system. The downside of it was that it began a tradition of the state being larger than society, but the good part of it is that it ended hereditary nobility, or the passing on of power and privilege by heredity, with the only exception of the emperor's throne. But emperors may come and go. Members of the same class of Confucian litocrats continued to assist the rulers in the governance of the land, thus accounting for the 2,000-year-long China dynastic history. We may call that long stretch of time the first rise of China, having the world's largest GDP until 1840.

I might add that the state, or the government, in the Confucian vision has two peculiar functions not known in the West, except perhaps as seen, in part, in [Plato's](#) philosopher-king. Plato's philosopher-king would be concerned with what music people listen to. That is Confucius' concern, too.

I said two peculiar functions unknown in the West. The first is to see that the people are duly morally armed against the decaying influences in society, and the second peculiar function is to participate in people's livelihood, to make sure that the people would enjoy the freedom from want, as well as from fear. Hence, the tradition of a state-led economy has persisted throughout Chinese history until today, just like the different concerns of the central banker as opposed to the individual consumer about falling prices. The central banker is always concerned that too deeply falling prices might trip off a deflation, whereas the consumer would love to see the prices fall and fall and fall.

The difference of the Confucian view of the state lies in its preoccupation with the nation's—not the individual's, the nation's—freedom from fear and want, not the individual's freedom of movement and speech. In addition to abetting the longevity of the Chinese dynastic history, the Confucian vision also contributed to the first rise of China as the greatest power on earth in terms of GDP, which was always larger than the combined total of Europe from year 1 AD to 1840 AD. After that, after the [Opium War](#), China then went down. This is based on [statistics](#) gathered by the English economic historian, [Angus Maddison](#). If you don't believe me, check it out with his [books](#).

In the early 19th century, however, the West came en masse and imposed itself on China in various inroads and encroachments. They came at a time of a downward trend of dynastic cycle, when the [Manchu dynastic house](#) was saddled with a sevenfold population explosion and a series of severe internal revolts. After the fateful [Opium War of 1840](#), British opium grown in the Indian colony began to inundate and emasculate the Chinese nation. After that, China went under, until about three decades ago, when China began to rise again.

In modern times, many Chinese patriots tried to revive the China dream. [Sun Yat-sen](#), who was trained as a surgeon in Hong Kong—so he was exposed to Western education—led a successful [revolution](#) that overthrew the last dynasty in China in 1911 and established the first republic in Chinese history. He tried to combine the glorious Chinese tradition with a modern democratic form of government, plus a state-led economy. But his vision and blueprint for national revival was first frustrated by the division of the warlords and thereafter derailed by the brutal aggression of the Japanese, whose invading forces imposed an eight-year [war](#) on China, sapping its strength.

[Mao Zedong](#), in his own way, tried to co-opt the [Marxist](#) ideology from the West left in order to cope with the capitalistic and imperialistic West on the right. Although the [Leninist](#) organizational strategy helped Mao's [revolution](#) to succeed in capturing political power, the Marxist class struggle ill-fitted the

Chinese cultural milieu. It ran head-on against a deeply ingrained Confucian notion of a harmonious society, thus dooming Mao's ambitions to revive China's past economic glory.

In the post-Mao period, however, [Deng Xiaoping](#) was able to succeed where Mao had failed, thanks to two very different approaches. One, Deng ended the class struggle and all Mao's political campaigns in its name, and two, he combined a marketized economy with socialism, making the two opposites work in synergy. Only the Chinese can do this, combine two opposites and make them work in synergy, recalling the Confucian teachings on the harmonization of opposites.

Here I might add a footnote. [Max Weber](#) thought Confucius' emphasis on harmony was a woe for the Chinese, because, in his mind, you have to be able to compete in order to have good economic development. But Max Weber did not know Chinese. The Chinese word "He" means not only harmony, but harmonization of opposites. There is a big difference. This points to the importance that you have to study Chinese in order to understand China. Even Max Weber made this big mistake, because he didn't know Chinese.

In the year 2005, [Hu Jintao](#), the then-secretary of the [Communist Party](#) in China, was the first communist leader to broach the idea of establishing a harmonious society, no more class struggle. But they didn't say this officially. They just said, "We want to build a harmonious society." The current head of the Communist Party, [Xi Jinping](#), is banking his China dream on the ideal of the harmonious society, as first enunciated by Confucius in his salutation to the Society of Great Harmony. In fact, Xi Jinping has professed harmonious society as one of his primary goals for China by 2049. Why 2049? Because that is the centennial of the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

So the Confucian vision of a good society remains alive, even under the communist regime in China. Confucius is reputed to be a man of all seasons and of all eras. This is proof that he is such a person.

I thank you.

## Questions

**QUESTION:** Professor, thank you so much for your remarks. You covered a huge swath of history in a very short amount of time, and you did it eloquently, which is very difficult to do. So I congratulate you on that.

The current president of China, Xi Jinping, has said that it is best to look at China's 60 years under the Communist Party with more continuity than we have. We have constantly heard about reform and opening up, splitting the 60 years of Communist Party rule between the 30 years under Mao Zedong and then after, the Deng Xiaoping era. Communist Party officials and many people in China always talk about this *gaige kaifang yihou* [after reform and opening up] this concept. But Xi Jinping has said that this is a flawed concept, that there is more continuity than we often give credit to.

I wonder if you can try to help us to better understand both the continuities and discontinuities between the first 30 years of Communist Party rule and the second 30 years.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** What Xi Jinping is trying to do, I think, is to dissociate himself from Mao. At the very beginning when he was selected as the secretary-general of the Communist Party, a lot of people, both in China and in America, thought that he was another Mao Zedong. So he subtly but deliberately put a distance between himself and Mao. So whatever Mao was doing, despite what he was doing, there was continuity, in order to justify why under Xi China has to return to its past glory. He has to emphasize the continuity, the cultural continuity. That is my first answer.

My second answer—rather, I can add on to what I just said. Despite the changes that came with Mao

Zedong, there was continuity, cultural continuity, that you cannot see, like the respect children had for their parents and the importance of *guanxi*. That came from the past, especially *guanxi* among the people related to you. That they could never do away with, despite Mao's effort.

Another thing, though, is that despite Mao's bad reputation, both at home today and abroad, he never denounced Confucius by name. It was his lieutenants who did that. *Pi Lin fan Kong* [Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius campaign]—actually, it is *pi Lin fan Zhou Enlai*. Kong [Confucius] became a substitute for Zhou En-Lai. If Mao had denounced Kong by name, Confucius would never be able to come back.

This leads me to the next point. In 1995, when the party was under *Jiang Zemin's* general secretaryship, the Communist Party, for the first time, celebrated and commemorated Confucius' birthday. After that, Confucius returned home through the front door, not through the back door. So today Xi Jinping could say, "We want to go back to our previous glory," meaning that you have to learn Confucian culture. Even there was a book quoting Xi Jinping. He didn't write it. There was a book teaching people how to read Confucius. After 1995, *lunyu*, the *Analects* of Confucius, is taught from the first grade up.

When I was visiting China—usually I would be out during the day, but that day I had to come back to get something in the afternoon. I turned on the TV, and there a professor was expounding Confucian teachings on television, CCTV 4. This is amazing. Confucian influence is gradually coming back to replace Marxism. As I said a while ago, they don't say "no more Marxism." They say "harmonious society," which means there is no more class struggle. If there is no more class struggle, there is no more Marxism. You have to read between the lines.

**QUESTION:** My name is Mori, from Japan.

If I understand correctly, I think a Western theologian, *Hans Küng*, categorized global ethics into four kinds of groupings. Liberal ethics assumes individual rights, individual responsibility, whereas communitarianism assumes collective rights, collective responsibility. Marxism, he argues, is collective responsibility, individual rights. He argued that the Confucius ethics assumes that leaders—you said philosopher-kings—individual responsibility and people's, communities' collective rights.

Do you think this is correct? That is the first question. And if this is the correct categorization, do you think that Deng Xiaoping's harmonizations are successfully transformed from Marxist ethics into Confucian ethics, with individual leaders' responsibility, while retaining people's collective rights?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** I think you seem to have made too much of a distinction between individualism and collective rights. As I said already, to Confucius, he was more concerned with the nation's, or collective, freedoms than the individual freedoms. A Chinese saying is, if the animal's hide is no more, where will the hair be? The hair will come out first. The hair has to be with the skin. Without the skin, there can be no hair. Without collective, there can be no individual. So it is collective rights and collective responsibility.

In the West, we talk about man in society, man as an individual, as if separable from society. But in the Chinese view, we have to talk about man in society, because once a man is removed from society, he cannot exist. Without the nation becoming rich, no individual can be rich or be well taken care of. This is China's view. That is why I emphasized that Confucius was more concerned with the nation's freedom rather than the individual's freedom.

Responsibilities, too. You cannot hold one individual responsible. Rather, responsibility can be shared and should be shared among all individuals. I don't know if I answered your question.

**QUESTIONER:** You emphasized that leaders' responsibility . . .

**JAMES HSIUNG:** There is this unsaid part of the Chinese view on governance. In the West, you believe all individuals are equal. Anyone can run for president. That is why you have [12 contenders](#) in the [Republican Party](#). Anybody can run for president. But in the Chinese culture, we assume that there is a clear division of labor. There are people who are attuned to leadership and there are people who have to follow the leaders. You may consider this sacrilegious—how can you say that? Sun Yat-sen, for example, classified people into eight categories: sage, lesser sage, talented, intelligent, ordinary, subordinate, stupid, and wicked. Those are his eight classifications. You classify people into these eight categories. Not everybody can lead. That is a very, very distinct difference between Chinese culture and Western culture. In the West, you assume everybody is equal.

In fact, a Korean American professor did a study between the Chinese system, the tribute system, and the Western [Westphalian](#) system of international relations. He found two differences. One is very appropriate for this discussion.

He said the two differences are: In the Westphalian system there were more wars than in the Chinese tribute system. In the five centuries he studied in the Chinese tribute system, there were only two wars, one of which was started by the Japanese. The other was started by the Chinese.

The second difference between the two systems was that, whereas in the Westphalian system, the Western system, states are nominally equal, but, in fact, they are not equal—the more powerful countries are more equal than the others—whereas in the Chinese system, they were all equal. Nominal equality, that is in the West, and the factual equality is something else. But the Chinese never talk about equality, because they assume there is a difference.

[Mencius](#) even said those who labor with their brains are destined to lead and those who work with their brawn, the muscles, are to be led. For that, he was criticized by the Communists, because the Communists have adopted the Western—[Marx](#) was a Westerner. Marxism is a Western ideology. So they criticized Mencius for doing that. But they no longer do that.

**DEVIN STEWART:** I have a lot of questions. A lot of the things that you have been saying are uniquely Chinese are found throughout the world. You were just saying the person who labors with his or her mind is more of a leader than someone with strength. The Ancient Greeks said the same thing, Plato and [Aristotle](#) and Socrates. Synthesizing opposites is found in ancient Indian logic, [Nagarjuna](#), as well as [Hegelian dialectic](#). What is uniquely Chinese about these things that are found throughout the world?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** The uniqueness is that the Chinese believe that you can make opposites work together in unison and in synergy, so that one plus one is equal to more than two.

**DEVIN STEWART:** But what is the difference between that and Hegelian synthesis, for example?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** Hegelian synthesis is antithesis-synthesis. You go to a next higher plateau. But the Chinese view of history is a cycle going horizontal. This is one of the reasons why Chinese Communism, including Mao Zedong, was so enamored by Marxism. Marxism has inherent Hegelian dialectics. But that is not making opposites work. It is still Western thinking, going upward. From conflict, you arrive at a higher plateau of things. That is not to make opposites work for you.

Socrates, for example, did not believe that you could make opposites work. What is small? Small comes from big, when bigness reduces until it becomes small. Therefore you cannot logically, according to him, make opposites work, because opposites are actually on two sides of the same thing.

**DEVIN STEWART:** Confucius was able to describe or to bring forth a moral system, a system of

ethics. Do you think that what he was doing was describing what he saw and describing what worked, or was he more prescribing? What do you think? Was it both?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** No, no. He was born into an era of great chaos. Therefore, he wanted to teach his disciples what they can do to improve society. He was a teacher. He was not an [inaudible] writer. He was a teacher trying to teach people to redeem themselves. If everybody redeemed himself or herself, then you would have a redeemed society.

Going back to something I said before about original goodness in human nature, the *Analects* was a compilation, a collection of footnotes taken by his disciples. Mencius wrote the book the *Mencius* [a collection of anecdotes and conversations from both Confucius and Mencius]. It was up to Mencius to spell out what was potentially in Confucius' mind. Different people interpret Confucius differently. Yan Xing, for example, believed human nature is bad. Yan Xing also was one of his disciples.

But Mencius represented the mainstream of Confucian thinking. This is the way he explained human nature, original good in human nature. He said, here is a man who sees a child about to fall into a well. If the child falls into the well, he will surely fall to certain death in the water. This man would rush to his rescue. When he does this, he is not thinking, "I'm doing his parents a favor," nor is he doing this to make himself a big hero in the community, nor because he doesn't like the child crying. He just does this out of the good nature in him.

That may be too bookish, too idealistic, until five years ago, 2007, something really happened in the New York subway system. A black man, a Navy veteran, was with his two daughters, aged two and four. On the platform, he saw a man falling from the platform. Then he saw the lights of a train coming. Without thinking, he jumped down to the tracks, pressed this guy down, and there was only one foot or so above the head. Before the train could screech to a stop, it was already the fifth car above his head. The people were screaming on the platform. It was only then he thought of his daughters. He said, "Will somebody please tell my daughters Daddy is okay down here?" If he thought of his daughters, he would not have jumped. But in that split second of life or death, he jumped to the rescue of someone, even at the risk of his own life.

That proved Mencius' point. This shows your original good, the original goodness of human nature.

I was expecting somebody would raise that question, but since nobody raised the question, I volunteered.

**QUESTION:** As I take it, one of the basic, perhaps founding premises of Confucian teaching, Confucian philosophy, is that when a person acts, he or she never acts alone. I take that idea to be so important, especially in today's world, when we see the havoc wreaked by this Western possessive individualism. In that context, we see the relevance of this Confucian idea of interaction and interconnectivity, especially now that we are living in a global world and now that also we have to know the impact of our actions vis-à-vis the environment and what it is doing to us and to everybody else.

In that context, would you like to comment on some of the modern relevance of Confucianism? I would be most interested to hear that from you—some of the contemporary relevance of Confucian ideas.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** It is very easy. Why Confucius was welcomed back today, is because there is so much widespread corruption. Yes, you could deal with corruption by killing everyone. But what is there to prevent future occurrences of corruption? This is why Confucius was welcomed back. You have to teach people to find their original good so that they will be incorruptible in the future. That is what makes Confucius' teaching relevant for today, even in Communist China.

I don't know if that is what you were asking for.

**QUESTION:** I think one of the big topics from a philosophical perspective in the 20th century is that after the Western world experiencing the [First World War](#) and the [Second World War](#), and then the philosophers' reflection about all these disasters, we have to consider and then discover the presence of the other. The presence of the other is huge, from my perspective, along the concept of difference. At least from a philosophical perspective, that was a big theme and topic.

My question is, I believe that Confucius mentions that you have to love your parents and your loved ones. There is kind of a circle. There is a very close circle you are supposed to love and care about. Then his concept of *ren*, the humanness, is enlarging the circle so that you can just incorporate others.

But at least from Mencius's perspective, he was kind of categorizing some relationships, like the father, parents, wife and husband, brothers, king and vassals and things like that.

My genuine question is, what is the Confucian concept of the ethics of the other or the strangers and refugees? What is the Confucian contribution to the question of the other on a global scale?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** Are you talking about the other-directedness?

**QUESTIONER:** The other in the sense of the one you are not—the strangers.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** There is a difference between the other-directedness talked about by American sociologists and the other-directedness in Confucian thinking. Confucius assumed that you should not just take care of yourself. Many societies—there is a group. You have to take care of your group first. Of course, Confucius, unlike [Jesus](#)—Jesus, I think, by comparison, was too idealistic. He said you have to love everybody the same way. But Confucius did not say that. Therefore, everything follows a line of diminishing returns.

You love your parents first, and your brothers and your elders. But there is a limit to how much you can extend your love. Of course, you cannot say you love a stranger as much as you love your parents. Jesus did not make that differentiation, but Confucius did. So Confucius, I think, was being more realistic, because he was not an evangelist.

**QUESTIONER:** The world is being more globalized and society is more likely interconnected. The encounter of the other is, I think, from a global ethics perspective, a fundamental issue. How do we build a relationship with the other, the strangers? How do we incorporate them into our circle so that we can make a better society, as a humane goal? At the end of the day, if you are loving your parents and your loved ones, you are not infinite. Sometimes you are more [inaudible]. That is why, at the end of the day, the other is always marginalized. That is why I am asking again, what is the Confucian contribution in terms of making our world more humane at the end of the day? That is my concern.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** I might add that under Mao there was an attempt to move from kinship to comradeship. Comradeship would be a much larger concept than kinship. Yes, there was such an attempt, but it didn't go very far, because this is basically human nature. You love your parents more than other people.

**QUESTION:** I will just continue from this discussion. Where is the concept of justice in that sense? If you love your parents more than others, you can be unjust towards other people by loving your parents. Also in terms of corruption, nepotism is a very widespread type of corruption in many countries, because of the thinking, "Okay, I love my parents, I love my cousins, I love my kinship more than others, and therefore they can get the employment," or whatever benefits. How does that fit into the thinking, social justice and corruption?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** But don't push this too far. You love your parents, your kin and siblings and so on. It



doesn't mean you have to violate the law to do that. You have to balance that, too.

Confucius saw the world as following an extension of concentric circles. It goes from you to the next circle, to the next circle, until there is a line of no return. You stop somewhere. You cannot possibly love everybody. It doesn't mean that you have to steal to show your love.

To show you the influence of Confucianism in Japanese law before—I don't know about now—in Japanese law, if you kill a stranger, you would not be punished as severely as if you killed your uncle, because your uncle is closer to you than a stranger.

Is it still true?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** That is Confucian influence. It doesn't mean you have to rob somebody in order to show your love to your parents.

Let me extend that point. As I said, there are downsides and upsides in Confucianism. This is a downside. If you are a student of Chinese history, you will discover the "empress dowager's syndrome." You don't find that in any other country. In England, she would be called "queen mother," but in China it is always emperor, so empress dowager, the empress mother.

An emperor, when he became emperor, his father had died already, but the mother may be remaining. But oftentimes the mother of the emperor would meddle in politics. Oftentimes, when officials disagreed with the emperor, they would go to the empress dowager to complain, and the empress dowager may call in the emperor and say, "You did something wrong. You had better change it." This happened very often.

You don't find this in any country's history, because of Confucius's emphasis on filial piety.

Viewing this from a political science perspective, it was in the empress's interest to propagandize or publicize or emphasize the importance of filial piety. Why? Because if all children listen to their parents, then you don't have rebels. The parents would divide your job of ruling the country. However, there is the obverse side. If the emperor emphasized filial piety, then you have to show you are filial, too. Therefore, you have to show you are filial to your mother. That ushered in the frequent intervention of the empress dowager.

So there are good sides and bad sides, too. I don't want to give you just one lopsided view.

**QUESTION:** Thank you so much for your insightful talk. I have been citing you for my first book. I wrote a book about human rights, its course in North Korea, Confucianism, post-colonialism, Marxist perspective.

**JAMES HSIUNG:** You are talking about that tiny little volume on Asian human rights.

**QUESTIONER:** Yes, I have been using your work a lot. I have two questions, very simple ones.

What is the CCP's [Chinese Communist Party] take on [Taoism](#)? We talked about Confucianism a lot. Has the CCP been using Taoist aspects of Chinese philosophy in their propaganda?

My second question is, the CCP also has been building a lot of [Confucius Institutes](#) and Confucian monuments along the Silk Road. Do you think it is going to work?

**JAMES HSIUNG:** First question, Taoism did not offer any threat to Communism. Confucianism may

offer a threat, because you should pay your loyalty to your parents first. What about the Communist Party? From the Communist Party, you should pay your loyalty to the Communist Party first, not your parents. Mao did not say this, but [Guo Moruo](#) did: "I don't love my parents. I love [Stalin](#) more than I love my parents," and so on. But Mao never said that.

So there is a competition. Communism is like a religion. In fact, the Communist Party, if you are carefully looking at it, is structured the same way as the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has one [Bible](#), which in this way, you have [Marxism](#). One pope, a chairman, or secretary-general of the party. Cardinals, and you have the Politburo members. Congregation, and you have the Communist membership.

I said I was a genius when I discovered that. I was disappointed to find that somebody else already said it 20 years before I did.

Confucius Institutes: Unfortunately—I think it is a good idea—there are 200-something, nearly 300 institutes in the world, all initiated by the [Hanban](#) in Beijing. But the only thing is, they teach Chinese language only. You cannot blame them. Where do you find the people qualified to teach Confucian culture? Confucian culture has been neglected until after 1995. So there is a problem of finding enough people who can teach more than just the language. That is one problem.

Second is the name of Confucius. In the West, as well as in pre-Communist China, China on the eve of Communist takeover, Confucius got a bad name. In the West, Confucianism is equated with autocracy, autocratic rule. And in China, Confucianism during the 20th century meant doing nothing.

But, in fact, there was a reason why Confucius got this [bei heiguo yinzhang](#) [scapegoated, stamped with a bad name] in Chinese—why Confucius got this stigma, this bad name. In the mid-19th century, a rebellion known as the [Taiping Rebellion](#) almost succeeded in overthrowing the Manchu dynasty. The Manchu dynasty discovered that all the [baqi jun](#), the [Eight Banner](#) troops that the Manchus came to China with, had proven ineffective in fighting the Taiping Rebellion. Therefore, the [empress dowager](#) at the time turned mainly to two essential officials, [Li Hongzhang](#), asking him to go back to his native Anhui province to train the Anhui army, and [Zeng Guofan](#) to go back to his native Hunan to train the [Xiangjun](#) or Hunan army. That was the beginning of the modern-day private army institution. With these private armies, these officials were able to put down the Taiping Rebellion.

Why would Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan choose to side with the Manchu court—the Manchus came in as aliens—against the Taipings, who were Han Chinese? The empress dowager then came to the wrong conclusion. She thought that these officials, Han Chinese officials, were Confucianists and they wanted to suppress the Taiping Rebellion because the Taiping leaders were against Confucius, and they wanted to fight for us because we were for Confucius. That is the first conclusion.

The second conclusion was, so long as we hang on to—pull on Confucius' feet, then we will be safe. Then all these Han officials will support us. So in her mind, doing nothing would be like revering Confucius in that she would command the loyalty of all the Han Chinese people. But that was the wrong conclusion.

Ever since then, though, it helped create an impression that Confucius wants you to do nothing. Therefore, if we want to save China, we have to knock down Confucius. This prompted [Hu Shih](#), among others, to say "[Dadao Kong jidian](#)," knock down the temple of Confucius.

But that was wrong. Confucius got that stigma wrongly, erroneously. I am glad today the Communist leaders have seen the wisdom to bring him back.

**DEVIN STEWART:** Thank you so much, Professor. Everybody, join me in thanking the professor.

[Applause]

**JAMES HSIUNG:** Thank you. [He claps back.] That is the Chinese way. When somebody claps, you—mainly the Chinese have learned it from the Soviets. I visited the Soviet Union and I found out when somebody applauds you, you applaud yourself. That is the Soviet way, and the Chinese Communists have learned from the Soviets.

But this is the typical Chinese way [he clasps both hands in front of his chest.] This means, I thank you. I thank you for your applause. Learn it.

### **Audio**

James Hsiung gives a clear and compelling explanation of Confucius' views on harmonious human relations and how societies should be run, discussing how his thought differs from Western philosophy. He also explains why and how Confucianism has finally been rehabilitated, after almost a century of ignominy.

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